

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 PANAMA 00427 210124Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----093098 210158Z /62
R 202222Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5356
INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 0427

STADIS////////////////////////////////////

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PN, VE, OVIP (BAKER, SENATOR HOWARD)
SUBJECT: BAKER-PEREZ CONVERSATION

REF: CARACAS 517

1. IN MY JUDGMENT, THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN PRESIDENT PEREZ AND SENATOR BAKER WAS HELPFUL CORRECTIVE TO THE CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THE SENATOR AND GENERAL TORRIJOS HERE. TORRIJOS COULD WELL HAVE LESS FLEXIBILITY THAN THE SENATOR MAY HAVE CONCLUDED AFTER HIS TALKS WITH THE GENERAL. I BELIVE THAT IT IS QUITE TRUE, AS PEREZ SAID, THAT THERE ARE DEFINITE LIMITS ON WHAT TORRIJOS CAN DELIVER; NEITHER TORRIJOS NOR ANYONE ELSE COULD CONVINCE PANAMANIAN TO ACCEPT SOME AMENDMENTS WHICH HAVE BEEN PROPOSED. INDEED, HE WOULD NOT TRY.

2. BECAUSE OF BAKER'S LACK OF SPECIFICITY WHEN HE DISCUSSED AMENDMENTS HERE, I AM NOT CERTAIN THAT HE GOT A GOOD FEEL FOR THE LIMITATIONS ON CHANGES TORRIJOS CAN ACCEPT. PRESIDENT PEREZ' HARD LINE WHEN CONFRONTED WITH THIS LACK OF SPECIFICITY MAY WELL HAVE BEEN, AS AMBASSADOR
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VAKY SUGGESTS, TACTICAL. ONE MUST BEAR IN MIND THAT TORRIJOS ALSO HAS TACTICAL ENDS IN VIEW. HE HAS BEEN BENDING OVER BACKWARD TO ALLAY IN THE MINDS OF HIS VISITORS ANY IMAGE THEY MAY HAVE OF A WILD MAN. HE CORRECTLY SEES HIS OWN IMAGE AS A PART OF THE PROBLEM IN THE U.S. AS PAINFUL AS IT MAY HAVE BEEN TO SENATOR BAKER, PEREZ PROBABLY DID US ALL A FAVOR BY STRESSING TORRIJOS' DIFFICULTIES AND THUS

PLAYING THE HEAVY FOR TORRIJOS, WHO FEELS HE SHOULD NOT
APPEAR INFLEXIBLE--REGARDLESS OF HOW MUCH FLEXIBILITY HE
ACTUALLY HAS.

3. I CONCUR FULLY WITH AMBASSADOR VAKY THAT WE SHOULD
KEEP PRESIDENT PEREZ INFORMED ABOUT OUR PLANS ON THE
TREATIES.A SITUATION MAY WELL ARISE IN WHICH HE CAN
HELP US WITH TORRIJOS--OR AT LEAST AVOID GIVING TORRIJOS
BAD ADVICE. PEREZ SHOULD UNDERSTAND, OF COURSE, THAT ANY
INFORMATION THAT WE PROVIDE ALONG THIS LINE IS NOT FOR
THE PURPOSE OF HIS TAKING AN INITIATIVE WITH TORRIJOS BUT
RATHER AS GUIDANCE WHEN AND IF HE HEARS FROM THE GENERAL.
AMBASSADOR VAKY WILL HANDLE THAT DISTINCTION WITH PEREZ
I KNOW.
JORDEN

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